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Alexandria Arms Firm

Report Cites Division On Interarmco Hazard

By Walter B. Douglas

Staff Reporter

Conflicting views on whether Interarmco, the international arms firm with headquarters and warehouses on Alexandria's waterfront, represents a safety hazard were advanced last night in a 73-page report to the City Council.

The Council decided to study the report, submitted by the city manager, Mayor Frank E. Mann called for an investigation of the dockside facilities last month.

Stocks of small arms ammunition kept in the Interarmco warehouses pose a "serious fire potential," according to Mathew M. Braidech, research director for the National Board of Fire Underwriters. His views were included in the report.

In a letter to Picot B. Floyd, assistant to the city manager, Braidech stated that the large stock of ammunition at Interarmco might hamper fire-fighting efforts there. A fire in the ammunition stores might reach "unmanageable proportions," the letter said.

But Alexandria Fire Chief Bernard J. Padgett says in the report, "It is my belief that the public is well protected so far as any hazards (exist) in these buildings."

Padgett reported that 850,000 rounds of small arms ammunition are stored in six of Interarmco's eight waterfront warehouses.

The Chief said in the report that two of the warehouses are "well protected by a supervised sprinkler system." He said that fire equipment can respond quickly enough to control any fire in the other buildings.

Mann's own investigations of the firm are recorded in the report. A memo from the Mayor states that Central Intelligence Agency officials told him that the CIA does "not condone or sanction Interarmco or control or use (the firm) in any way."

Mann also reported that a State Department official told him the firm was not "sanctioned" as part of National policy.

However, Interarmco must secure State Department licenses for imports or exports.

Interarmco Vice President Richard Breed asked for time to examine the report, and to be given an opportunity to submit evidence on the safety of a small arms rebulleting machine that the firm seeks permission to use.